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ABSTRACT

Active learning results in better comprehension and retention of course concepts than passive learning. Experiential exercises (EE's) are a valuable means of achieving the goals of active learning. Well conceived EE's require, among other things, that the student: (1) engage in the gathering of concept-related behavioral data; (2) write a report which analyzes and evaluates collected data from the experience; and (3) participate in a classroom discussion of the experience. Objections to the inclusion of experiential learning in courses concern lack of available classroom time, lack of perceived academic value of exercises, and demands for preparation and grading time. Among benefits accrued by students using EE's and written reports in the nonverbal communication course are personal experience with operation of principles and concepts in their everyday lives and active critical processing of academic nonverbal concepts and principles, resulting in enhanced student learning of nonverbal skills. Benefits accrued by teachers using EE's and written reports in this course include, among others: enhanced insight into the students' grasp of concepts; generation of examples personally relevant to students; and more active student participation. Some of the criteria for selecting and creating meaningful EE's are: specific, concrete identification of the conceptual learning goals the exercise should achieve; identification, modification, or creation of EE's which effectively produce the desired student learning goals; and creation of clear directions for conducting the EE to ensure students' understanding. (Contains 10 references; suggestions and examples of EE's are appended.) (CR)

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Incorporating Experiential Learning in the Teaching of the Nonverbal Communication Course

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INCORPORATING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN THE TEACHING OF THE NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION COURSE

We are all familiar with the evidence that active learning results in better comprehension and retention of course concepts than passive learning (Boswell & Eison, 1991). There are many means by which active learning can be fostered. Chickering and Gamson (1987) suggest that for learning to be active and involve students in the process, students must read, write, discuss, or be engaged in solving problems. Higher order thinking tasks such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation are essential for active involvement of the student. Experiential exercises (EE`s) are a valuable means of achieving the goals of active learning. Well conceived EE`s (EE`s) require that the student

- engages in the gathering of concept-related behavioral data
- writes a report which analyzes and evaluates collected data from the experience
- participates in a classroom discussion of the experience

This approach to experiential learning incorporates not just one, but many of the requirements for active learning.

Despite our recognition that the involvement of students in activities and exercises is a form of active learning, many teachers do not incorporate experiential learning into their course curriculum. Other teachers make an effort to include experiential learning but find the results less than satisfying, or of questionable merit. Many of us, however, have found ways of incorporating experiential learning that provide meaningful, beneficial learning environments for our students.

Common Objections to Incorporating EE's

There are many reasons offered for the lack of incorporation of experiential activities and for dissatisfaction with the results of the efforts which are made. Objections to the inclusion of experiential learning in courses often include concerns regarding:

1. Lack of available class time for exercises
2. Lack of perceived academic value of exercises
3. Demands for preparation time
   a. Time required for finding and selecting exercises
   b. Time required for creating clear directions for activities and reports
4. Time that would be spent on grading
5. Potential for student non-compliance with the directive to perform the activity portion of the exercise.

These concerns are sometimes accepted as insurmountable barriers. They are then used as excuses to justify refusing to incorporate EE's within the course curriculum.

Responses to Objections to the Incorporation of EE's

If the objections cited above were true, and there were no means to manage the perceived problems, they would provide legitimate justification for excluding the use of EE's. This would be particularly true if no offsetting benefits were accrued by their inclusion. Before we give up on incorporating EE's as a means of stimulating active learning, lets first examine each of these major concerns objectively.

Common Objection #1: Lack of available class time for exercises.

This claim is often stated as "With all of the material I need to teach in the class, I have no time to include exercises in my class. All of the time is needed for lectures." The notion that involving students in active learning experiences requires the "loss" of needed classroom time is a myth! In most cases, this perception is based on the mistaken assumption that the exercises must be conducted within the classroom. There are many opportunities for experiential learning by students that require little to no classroom time. In addition, the experiential learning exercises may even reduce the amount of time needed for lectures. Little, if any, classroom time is "lost" if:

1. The EE's are conducted by students outside of class
2. Students prepare and submit written reports of their experiences
3. Guided classroom discussions of the experiences are focused to produce students' discovery of the same ideas traditionally covered by lectures.

The ways in which these exercises can reduce the amount of time necessary for lectures is further discussed below in the section Benefits Accrued by the Teacher.

Common Objection #2: Experiential learning exercises lack academic value.

Merely assigning any exercise obviously does not necessarily result in valuable learning. Accepting this as a justification for excluding or avoiding experiential learning is a groundless objection. The answer to minimal learning value lies not in excluding experiential learning

exercises. Instead, it calls for a closer examination of the kinds of exercises utilized, and a search for exercises that do facilitate meaningful learning.

With careful thought and preparation, many communication courses can incorporate experiential learning which enhances, rather than diminishes the content value of the course. I routinely use EE's when teaching courses in Interpersonal Communication, Nonverbal Communication, Political Communication, Small Group Communication, and Communication Theory. Additionally, performance oriented courses such as public speaking are routinely built around EE's. Often the "quality" of these exercises has a strong effect on the value of the course.

EE's are educationally valuable when they meet three criteria for use/inclusion:

1. Careful selection of the exercise to generate critical focus upon identified, valuable, course concepts
2. Careful design of the exercise to produce experiences that are relevant to course content and easily understandable to the students
3. Follow-up via written student reports and/or class discussions in which the students respond to questions that are designed to illuminate course concepts.

Suggestions for ways in which one can select or create EE's that enhance the academic value of a course are discussed in ***Criteria for Selecting/Creating Meaningful EE's***.

Common Objection #3: EE's demand too much preparation time.

Obviously, the time invested finding, selecting, or creating exercises and creating clear directions for activities and reports is clearly a legitimate concern. The use of EE's and reports **requires** that the teacher spend time finding, identifying, or creating useful exercises. The teacher must also invest time to create clear directions that result in the proper performance of the activities and report writing. This demand, however, becomes much less burdensome when subsequent courses allow the use of same exercises, especially those appreciated by many students. The next time you teach the course, or if you teach a different course which contains a unit which corresponds to the current course material, you have an exercise that you have already prepared and tested. Over time, there will be occasions in which assignments can be re-used with little, perhaps no, revision. The suggestions found in the section ***Criteria for Selecting/Creating Meaningful EE's*** may facilitate the creation of good exercises with less need for extensive revision of initial exercises.

Common Objection #4: EE's require out-of-class time spent on grading.

This common concern, like the concern expressed in objection three, is obviously legitimate. Teaching is a time consuming activity which places many demands upon us. The requirement for the submission of written reports carries with it a requirement that the teacher spend time reading and grading those reports. If the assignments are ungraded, the average student is unlikely to put much effort into the task and the various benefits of these exercises (discussed below in ***Benefits Accrued by Students*** and ***Benefits Accrued by Teachers***) will not be achieved. The amount of time required for grading will vary as a function of:

- the clarity of the assignment and the instructions for writing the report
- the quantity of writing required of each student for completion of the required elements of the report (maximum length limits are strongly recommended)

- the complexity of the content of the reports
- the differences in reading speed of the teachers
- the individual teacher's ability to quickly notice and mark errors
- the general quality of students' writing

The demand for grading time cannot be completely eliminated. There are, however, steps that can be taken that help us reduce the amount of time required for this task. For example, when I include written exercises I control the demands I create for myself as follows :

- I review the assignment to make sure that I am asking for reports that contain data that will facilitate the desired learning but do not call for the inclusion of unnecessary data.
- I reduce the number of my written responses required by establishing (when the first of these exercises is assigned in a given course) that lengthy introductions and summaries are unnecessary and not to be included in written reports.
- I direct students to restrict their reports to full sentence responses, in paragraph form, to each question posed in the directions.
- Papers which are typed and double-spaced are easier for me to grade and mark. I, therefore, require that all reports be in that form.

The most recent set of papers I graded for a Nonverbal Communication class was an assignment which focused upon the use and effects of eye contact. There were 28 papers submitted and I graded them in two and one-half hours. I am a relatively fast reader, but, my relatively poor skill in spelling leads me check the dictionary, my 30,000 Words book, or my computer spell-check, for all but the most ordinary words before I mark them wrong. If I were more confident of my spelling skill the grading task would take even less time.

While I'm sometimes guilty of moaning about the grading task, I am thoroughly convinced that the academic benefit to the students is more than worth the time required. I also find that reading student papers provides me many teaching benefits. These benefits include: insight into students' grasp of concepts; improved ability to select questions for use in class discussion which lead to the uncovering of principles; and insights into the concerns and interests of current students.

Common Objection #5: The potential for student non-performance of the activity portion of the exercise.

This concern arises when the experiential segment of the exercise is conducted outside of the classroom. Teachers have asked me, "How can I know that the student really did the exercise and didn't just make it up?" My response to this objection is that we can never know this with absolute certainty, but there are clues which provide some insight as to whether or not they performed the exercise. We can't achieve absolute certainty in this regard when we ask students anything that draws on their experiences, but we routinely accept the responses in class discussions.

Even if a student does not actually perform the experiential activity, and "makes up" a response, the student is still forced to think actively and critically about the subject in specific ways and create hypothetical experiences and results. They are inevitably more actively involved with the concepts and principles than they would be without this creative thinking and they, therefore, still become more actively engaged in the learning process and in the linkage between the academic concepts and everyday life than they would be with passive learning. The learning

that takes place in these instances may not be as rich as that which occurs when the student engages in the performance of the specified behaviors. Learning does, nonetheless, take place in spite of the student's attempt to avoid it. When the assignment provides clear specific directions regarding the activities they are to engage in and the content to be included in written reports, students may be less likely to assume that they can fabricate an acceptable response without performing the activity.

The benefits achieved through active learning described here, which occur even despite student efforts to circumvent the activities, are only a portion of the benefits derived from these assignments. The various benefits are set forth in the next segment of this paper.

Benefits Accrued by Students through Use of Experiential Exercises and Written Reports in the Nonverbal Communication Course

The preceding segments of this paper explored and addressed the objections commonly raised with regard to the incorporation of EE's and written reports within the curriculum of any course. Responses to those objections were also within the context of courses in general. In this section and the sections which follow, comments will specifically focus upon the use of these exercises in the nonverbal communication course. These comments and suggestions, with minor modifications, could be generalized to almost any communication course.

The use of EE's with written reports of the experiences in the nonverbal communication course results in a wide variety of important educational benefits accrued by the students. Your students benefit because of subsequent:

- Personal experience with the operation of nonverbal content principles in everyday life, providing the opportunity for students to improve nonverbal communication skills through better understanding of the elements involved and experience gained through exercises
- Personal discovery of the applicability of academic nonverbal concepts to everyday life
- Active processing of academic information about nonverbal communication
- Increased participation in class discussions
- Increased confidence in their ability to actively participate in the classroom environment.
- Opportunity to improve oral communication skills through their use in class discussions.
- Improved written communication skills

While the inclusion of EE's may be time consuming for the teachers, these seven benefits to student learning would seem to justify that extra time commitment. This is especially true if you have the same students in two or more classes and benefit both from their improved skills at thinking and communicating, and from their enhanced perception of your commitment to teaching them as individuals.

Benefit #1: Student Personal Experience with operation of principles and concepts in their everyday lives.

By engaging in directed experiential activities outside of the classroom the student discovers that the principles and concepts that are part of the course's content actually DO operate in their everyday personal and professional life (surely all of us have numerous students who see these

principles and concepts as merely "dead definitions" or unimportant "ideas" which really are not relevant to "their" lives). They discover they use the behaviors both as producers of behaviors that are interpreted by others and in their own interpretation of the behaviors of others. They develop understanding regarding which behaviors function to produce successful interpretations and what behaviors they may produce which inadvertently result in undesired interpretations. The impact of being told that a given behavior is likely to produce a particular response or interpretation is qualitatively different from actually experiencing the response in every day life.

Benefits #2 & #3: (2) Personal discovery of the applicability of "academic" concepts to their everyday lives (with extra benefit of increased retention and believability of the concept/principle) and (3) Active critical processing of academic nonverbal concepts and principles, resulting in enhanced student learning of nonverbal skills.

A student may intellectually process lecture data which says that people interpret a lack of eye contact during interpersonal communication as an indicator of disinterest, non-involvement, and unwillingness to communicate. This information is not, however, as meaningful to the student as actually encountering overt reactions in real life that are consistent with the claim made in lecture format. Cialdini clearly states that his research indicates that "a person who has previously experienced some features of the "thing" will have an easier time imagining it it...thus making it appear more valid [and believable] (1980, pp. 8-9)." Brembeck and Howell (1952), in discussing "Gaining & Maintaining Attention," delineate 'the vital" (relevant) as being crucial to gaining or maintaining audience attention. If we as teachers can agree on nothing else, the need for keeping student attention would be the first area of agreement. Exercises which are "perceived" as "relevant" to students' day-to-day lives engage their attention (And according to our field's public speaking texts, increase **long-term retention** of the concept/idea). The student who performs an exercise that directs them to carry on conversations with various people without making eye contact with the other person discovers that the people they try the exercise on will respond in a variety of ways including: attempting to end the conversation; telling them to "'listen' to me when I'm talking to you;" and complaining "why did you ask me a question if you weren't interested in my answer?" These, and similar, responses cause the student to realize that <u>real people</u> actually do interpret their lack of eye contact as communicating specific, real, meanings (i.e., its not "just a claim made in a textbook to be remembered for exams").

As a result of these examples being "real" and personally experienced by the student, they are likely to have more meaning for the individual student. They may draw upon these experiences when answering exam questions as well as when encountering undesired responses in future interpersonal/nonverbal communication events.

Benefits #4 & #5: (4) Increased student participation in class discussions and (5) Increased student confidence in their ability to actively participate (and learn from) communicating in the classroom (and other) environments.

The use of EE's and written reports provides the potential for a forum in which students are relatively comfortable with regard to taking part in class discussions. The student was told to engage in a particular activity, to notice particular things that happened, and to write down responses to specific questions. The student is then much more likely to feel prepared to describe the experience when asked about it in class than they might feel if called upon to recall a specific

data item from the textbook or a lecture. A simple question such as "Tell me what happened when you subtlety moved away from the person while you were talking to them," provides an opportunity to speak that is not terribly intimidating to most students. The combined answers of several students to this simple question, however, result in a listing of the effects of increased or inappropriate distancing upon interpersonal communication and the ways in which perceptions of inappropriate distancing affects the communication behaviors of others. Additional probes such as "Based on what we have just heard people tell us about the reactions when they moved away from the person they were talking to, how do you think people were interpreting the increase in distance?" generate responses in which students discover the underlying principles. My students are much more willing and able to answer the above questions than they are if the question is "state the ways in which inappropriate use of distance affects interpersonal communication," or "What meaning is attributed to an increase in distancing during interpersonal communication?"

The successful participation in these discussions can reduce the reticence of students regarding involvement in other discussions, asking questions, responding to questions, providing examples, etc. In short, they become used to the idea of participating and student participation and active involvement become a norm rather than a norm violation. The ultimate result is increased learning of course concepts and improvement in students' oral communication skill.

Benefit #6: Student improvement of their oral communication skills through using them in meaningful class discussions. The first means by which students' oral communication skills are improved through the use of EE's and written reports seems intuitively obvious. Experience in speaking publicly improves both confidence in speaking and skill in speaking.

The second and third means by which the assignments improve oral communication skill are slightly less obvious and stem from the requirement that they prepare written reports. It is highly desirable to require students to submit a written report of the experience, particularly when the experience is conducted outside of the teacher's supervision. Writing reports requires more focus on organizing and constructing their messages, thereby resulting in some improvement in the organization and content of their oral messages as well. Writing reports of their experiences requires the student to mentally process the observed data.

Writing reports also help students learn to crystallize their conclusions, interpretations, understanding, etc. much more finely that they are likely to if they are just directed to "think about" their observations. If the student's report is done according to instructions which require them to write about specific concepts or principles it causes the student to focus more clearly on the elements that the exercise is designed to tap and illuminate.

A clear example of the difference between "think about" assignments and those requiring written reports can be illustrated by my own experience of the difference between the two. One semester I tried using exercises in a nonverbal communication class without requiring the submission of written reports. The exercises were all ones that I had used successfully with required reports. I have since used these exercises successfully with required reports. All directions for each of the exercises were unchanged from the "required reports" versions with the single exception of the substitution of "be prepared to discuss" in place of "prepare a written report."

The outcomes of the exercises without the report requirement were agonizingly less satisfactory than the results which included the written report requirement. It became apparent

that many students were not actually performing the exercises (perhaps one reason many teachers worry that EE's are not actually being performed by students). They seemed to operating on the belief that they could avoid participation in class discussion. Whether they thought everybody else would do the exercise and want to talk about it, thereby making their participation unnecessary or less noticeable or were gambling on not being called upon was unclear, and not really particularly important - if some students are unwilling to learn by doing the exercise, you can not force them to do so.

Many students, perhaps even most, did seem to have performed the exercises. However, these students did not develop the same ability to speak clearly about their observations, interpretations, and conclusions as students who had been required to submit written reports. Some of these latter students who apparently performed the exercises but could not discuss them satisfactorily also performed analogous exercises with required reports in one or more of the other courses I teach. The difference in their performance during discussions was clearly superior with reports to that produced without reports. I will add that the students I am referring to in my with/without comparisons were fairly evenly split with about half of them having been in a "reports" course prior to and half after the "be prepared to discuss" course. I attribute the observed difference in the outcome of the exercises as largely stemming from the difference in the degree of focus and discipline required for "thinking about" and putting their thoughts into written form.

Benefit #7: Improved Student Written Communication Skills. The requirement that students prepare written reports of their experiences not only improves the quality of classroom discussion and the processing of information, it also provides the students the benefit of opportunities to improve their skill in written communication. Sadly, many of today's college students are unbelievably deficient in written communication skills. It seems that fewer courses and teachers at all levels of the educational system require the amount of written work that was once common.

Regardless of the reason for the deficiency, it undeniably exists. Many students commit an amazing variety of **very** basic errors such as:

- lack of subject-verb agreement
- use of incorrectly spelled words
- use of incorrect words.

It has been common at each of the four universities at which I have taught to receive papers which contain basic errors. Anecdotal information from colleagues at other institutions provides support for beliefs that similar deficiencies are rather common. These basic errors include (just to provide examples we can all relate to):

- incorrect use of simple words such as to, too, and two;
- confusion between there and their,
- writing "or" when they should write "are;"
- the use of "are" instead of "our"
- the infamous use of "alot" in place of "a lot" or "allot"
- "creative" word errors such as
- martial for marital
- bridle for bridal
- defiantly for definitely

- wonder for wander (and vice versa)
- then for than (and vice versa)

No, the foregoing examples are not simply typos as I wanted to believe when I first encountered them. The same errors occur repeatedly in the student's paper and occur across papers received from students. I initially just marked these errors in the same way I marked spelling and typing errors, partially because I had not yet accepted the notion that spelling and typing were not the sole cause of the error. I assumed that students would recognize their mistake when it was pointed out. Instead students came to me and argued that I had mistakenly marked the words as wrong. Students who did not come to me to discuss my marking of the words mindlessly continued to perpetuate their errors.

I now mark these errors by circling them and putting a "ww" above them (having explained in class what "ww" means). Students are often surprised by the discovery that they have been **routinely** using the incorrect word for the **meaning** they intended to convey. I cannot accept the idea that we should make no effort to correct these problems before students achieve their college degree and enter the work-force. We may not eliminate the problem, but we can at least reduce it. We can "blame" elementary and secondary education systems, home schooling, the English department, etc., for the existence of this problem, but if we are to **honestly** feel that we are **communication** teachers, we cannot, in good conscience, ignore the problem.

My most current success story in this regard is a student who somehow managed to make **83** (no that is not a typo) spelling and word errors within a two-page paper when he took his first course from me a year ago. His most recent paper was six pages long and contained three errors of this nature. This sort of experience is what makes the extra time and effort required for using EE's with written reports seem satisfyingly worthwhile.

The use of written reports also provides a means by which the teacher may more easily identify the vocabulary related deficiencies mentioned above in my comments about erroneous word use. It is sometimes difficult for me to catch these errors when they are committed orally. Once I am alerted to the specific error through their written submissions, I often find that the student is also saying the wrong word. If the student never discovers the error the error will continue.

I believe that the foregoing benefits accrued by students provide more than ample justification for the inclusion of EE's with written reports as a part of the curriculum for the nonverbal communication course. The students, however, are not the only ones who reap benefits from these exercises.

Benefits Accrued by Teachers through the Use of EE's and Written Reports in the Nonverbal Communication Course

Despite the burdens the teacher may experience as a result of using EE's and reports in the nonverbal communication class (primarily the demands that the teacher spend time generating and grading the exercises), there are numerous and significant benefits accrued by the teacher. The use of EE's and reports in the nonverbal communication class:

- Provides the teacher insight into the students' grasp of concepts

- Generates examples of nonverbal behaviors and contexts which are personally relevant to current students and which the teacher may then draw upon in both the current and later classes
- Allows the teacher the opportunity to incorporate alternative evaluative measures of student accomplishments in course grades.
- Results in more active participation by students.
- Provides the often needed intangible rewards of seeing students significantly improve

Benefit #1: You gain a greater insight of students' understanding and internalization of course concepts/principles/skills.

Classroom discussions and examination of the written reports submitted by students provide us opportunities to gain insight into student progress with regard to their grasp of course concepts. With this insight we are better able to tailor our lectures to meet the needs of the given group of students. We discover which concepts they have a clear grasp of, and can therefore be merely reviewed or summarized. We also know which concepts must be taught in greater detail for the students to achieve the desired degree of understanding. As a result of this knowledge we are able to make more efficient and appropriate use of the available lecture time.

Benefit #2: Generates examples which are personally relevant to current students

Student interests, concerns, and perceptions change over time. Examples that are perceived as relevant to students at one point in time may no longer strike the same chord a few years later. Perceived relevance of ideas is critical in maintaining attention and interest, as well as its importance for the probability of future recall (Brembeck & Howell, 1952; Sprague & Stuart, 1988). It is difficult for us to anticipate and create examples that students will perceive as relevant - we are no longer students and have different concerns and experiences from those of our students. When the current students generate the examples those examples come from their own life-experiences and are more likely to be perceived by these students as relevant.

Benefit #3: Allows teacher the opportunity to incorporate alternative evaluative measures of student accomplishments in course grades

The use of EE's with written reports also allows the teacher opportunities to incorporate alternative evaluative measures of students accomplishments, in addition to formal testing, in deriving the students' grades for the course. Not all students perform well when faced with the pressure of tests. Other students are very capable at identifying data that will be asked on tests and retaining it just long enough to answer test questions. It has also been found that tests and quizzes provide motivation for student learning, but that the form of testing influences what and how students learn (Milton & Eison, 1983). The use of testing should not be, and is not likely to be, abandoned as a means of evaluating student learning. It is also suggested, however, that the use of alternative means of evaluating student learning is desirable as well. The use of alternative measures of student progress and accomplishment may mitigate the effect that test anxiety has upon the performance of some students. It may also allow us to tap into student abilities (and deficiencies) that are not as accessible through standard testing.

Benefit #4: Results in more active participation by students

The use of EE's and written reports also results in a greater amount of active participation by students. This greater participation is not necessarily limited to the classroom discussion of the EE's. Students who become comfortable with oral participation in discussions of exercises are also likely to then feel more comfortable asking questions, providing examples, and responding to questions that are not tied to the EE's. This phenomenon and explanations for some increases in class participation were discussed above in *Benefits Accrued by Students*.

Benefit #5: Provides the often needed intangible rewards of seeing students significantly improve

I will now offer one final benefit for teachers accrued through the use of EE's and written reports. This benefit is admittedly based on emotional rather than intellectual considerations. The data in support of this claim is from my own experience with the use of these exercises and may or may not be generalizable to others. Many of my students actually enjoy these exercises, some even request more of them. I have had numerous students spontaneously tell me, even after they have graduated, how valuable the exercises were to them. Students have, in casual conversation five or more years after the completion of a course, brought up the topic of the exercises I had them do and then proceeded to tell me specifically what they had to do, what nonverbal communication concepts they discovered, and how these discoveries have influenced their communication to the current day. Having students ask to do more for a class instead of complaining about the amount of work they do is very rewarding to a teacher. When the EE's students perform result in their understanding and internalization of concepts that are useful throughout their lives, it is especially rewarding.

Criteria for Selecting/Creating Meaningful EE's

It is sometimes possible to use EE's found in resources such as teacher's manuals, and exercises in textbooks. Many of the suggestions for activities found in these resources need minor adaptation to fit the specific needs for a course. We may alternatively choose to create our own exercises. Regardless of the source of EE's, there are several criteria we should apply to the process of selecting, modifying, or creating effective experiential assignments:

- Very specific, concrete identification of the conceptual learning goals the exercise should achieve
- Identification, modification or creation of EE's which effectively produce the desired student learning of identified learning goals
- Honest consideration of the reasonableness of what can be expected or required of students
- Creation of clear directions for conducting the EE to ensure students understand how to correctly conduct the EE
- Creation of clear directions for writing the report of the experience and conclusions as a result of engaging in the EE, including, at minimum
    - Clear identification of the proper format for the written product

- Clear identification of the questions the student should respond to regarding their experience in engaging in the EE
- Careful planning of the discussion questions to be used in class to ensure that the concepts you wish to illuminate emerge and students feel comfortable participating

Applying these criteria will help you select or create exercises which enrich student learning of critical course concepts, provide you insight into the progress of students' learning, and reduce the time you have to devote to grading EE assignments.

Criterion #1: Delineating very specific, concrete identification of the conceptual learning goals the exercise should achieve.

Whether the exercise is your original creation or from other sources, the first step in selecting EE's which enhance valuable active learning is the same. The critical first step is concretely identifying the learning goal we wish to achieve through the use of the exercise. Including meaningful and effective experiential learning exercises within or outside a class requires teachers to begin at the logical point of asking themselves what benefit they hope to achieve - i.e., what is it you want the students to learn. In other words, this criteria is very similar to a "specific purpose statement" or "persuasive speech goal." It may be that some of the "worthless" experiential learning attempts are the result of working backwards and asking what exercise is available for use and then trying to figure out how the exercise could be useful. Teachers who begin by examining a unit or chapter of course material and identifying the concepts and principles in that material that they consider highly important are much more likely to discover or create exercises which are meaningful learning experiences. Logically the likelihood of a meaningful exercise that is closely tied to important course concepts is lower if the "critical concepts" to be learned by students have not been identified.

Criterion #2: Identification, modification or creation of EE's which effectively produce the desired student learning of identified learning goals

After identifying the concepts and principles that are deserving of special attention, you need to ask what experiences could help students truly understand these principles. I find that careful consideration of what real life context the nonverbal behaviors I want my students to learn about might occur in everyday life leads me to the basic idea of the exercise I need to assign to the students. This provides the guidance needed to judge which EE's would result in their experiencing the principle or concept in the "real" world. For example, if I am teaching a unit on kinesics, I might identify posture as the element of focus. I would then determine that I wanted the students to learn the principles regarding the effects of different postures upon interpersonal communication and upon the communication behaviors of the individual utilizing the posture. I would therefore decide that the experiential exercise should direct the student to use two distinctly different postures within similar contexts so they will have the opportunity to discover that the changes in postures result in differing outcomes regarding their own behavior and their interactions with others.

Since I am aware that the effects of styles of posture vary as contexts change, I would also assign them to try out the two postures in more than one context. Their experiences should then allow the students to discover:

- that they feel different and are more alert when they use upright posture
- that the expectations of others regarding posture vary as a function of context
- that the posture they use has an effect upon the quality and quantity of communication which takes place
- that the effects of posture upon communication will vary as a function of the context within which it is used.

Criterion #3: Honest consideration of the reasonableness of what can be expected or required of students

It is often necessary at this point to throw in a "dash of reality" and consider what "experiments/exercises" I can reasonably ask my students to engage in. Nonverbal communication occurs in every instance of humans interacting directly with one another. Since some human interactions fall into the realm of the immoral, indecent, unethical, illegal, and unsafe, we would, eliminate from consideration any assignments which would expose our students to immoral or uncomfortable contexts or environments.

There are other interactions which do not contain these undesirable qualities ***if voluntarily*** engaged in by consenting adults, but which it would be unethical, immoral, or illegal for a teacher to require students to engage in. Examples of this latter category of interaction experiences would be those which call for:

- students to experiment with forms of touching behavior inappropriate to the relationship or the situation
- students to engage in predictably traumatic or humiliating activities
- students to divulge details of their life or personal relationships which are "intimate" enough to make the student feel uncomfortable to reveal them

If it is determined that the proposed experience is one which falls into one of these categories, ask yourself, honestly, if there is some modification (e.g. a different location, a slightly different task) that will eliminate the problem. If there is no way the problem associated with the experience, we again eliminate the experience from consideration.

Finally we test the reasonableness of the exercise by considering more mundane matters such as the amount of time, expense, and effort the exercise will require of the students. If you find that the proposed exercise is one which will require an investment of an unreasonable amount of time, expense, or effort on the student's part (while we might like to pretend our class is the only, or most important class the student is taking, we have to be realistic about their learning and information processing capabilities, other classes, and often their out of school work demands), don't just eliminate the basic idea. Put serious thought into modifications that will reduce the required student investment. It may be that the modified exercise is sufficient for your purposes even if it is slightly less than optimal for achieving the entire scope of the desired learning goal. However, a large part of effective teaching is discovering ways to help your students learn instead of simply trying to force them to learn.

For example, if I want my students to have a valuable opportunity to observe the nonverbal components utilized in greeting people, a major airport or a local "meet-and-greet" student club would be a fine locale. Unfortunately, the nearest major airport from my university is a three hour drive, and many of my students would be very uncomfortable going to a "club." The same behaviors do occur, although less frequently at the local mall which is less than 10 minutes from

campus. Even though the Mall is not quite as good an environment for the observation the experiment can be conducted there and the travel-time and expense is reasonable while the six-hour round trip to the closest major airport is not.

Several years ago, at a different university, I developed an exercise that had as its goal the identification of the nonverbal behaviors involved in pedestrians successfully getting traffic to yield to them when crossing busy thoroughfares on campus and determining the ways in which the successful pedestrians' behavior differed from those of the unsuccessful pedestrians. On occasion you would see a student futilely attempt to gain the right-of-way for several minutes, often until another student with other behaviors walked up and caused the traffic to yield immediately. A single student would need to spend several hours observing one or more of the crosswalk areas to gain sufficient data upon which to base conclusions. The simple adjustment of having the students divide into groups of ten and each watch for an hour and then combine their collected data produced sufficient data with a much more reasonable investment of time by each individual student.

With critical thought and creativity, exercises which provide the student opportunities to observe and experience real world instances of nonverbal principles can easily be created. When the pervasive nature of nonverbal communication is considered, it is not difficult to see to it that the experiences are ethical, safe, and do not require an unwarranted amount of time or effort by the student.

Criterion #4: Creation of clear directions for conducting the EE to ensure students understand how to correctly conduct the EE

Clear directions for the performance of an activity are important when you expect students to participate in specific experiences in a particular manner. Clear directions which include specification of behaviors which are necessary for the successful generation of the desired experience achieve critical importance if the exercise is to be performed outside of the direct supervision of the teacher. Give thought to the identification of necessary factors and to factors which are likely to interfere with the successful achievement of the target experience. Provide each student a written copy of the directions to be followed by the student, including any required factors to be included from the following: what they are to do, with whom, in what context and environment.

The directions should also specify what, if any, behaviors, contexts, etc. must not be included in the experience. As an example, when I have students perform one exercise that is intended to provide an understanding of the effects of the absence of eye contact upon interactions in each of several relational contexts, it is necessary that I include the directive that the exercise must be done in circumstances in which it is clearly possible to use eye contact and in which the environment is relatively free of alternative socially acceptable visual involvement - that the other person must be located such that they can observe the absence of eye contact and neither party can be engaged in an activity that requires eye focus on anything other than the other communicator. "You must be in the same room and be physically situated such that eye contact could be utilized. You must not conduct this exercise while either you or the other party is driving a car, watching television, or doing anything else that demands the ongoing use of eyes."

If the experience is to achieve the goal of focusing the students attention on the factors which reveal principle or concept relevant information, the directions must also alert the student

regarding what sorts of things they are to make specific effort they are attend to; what they are to notice and what they are to think about after the interaction ends. When the reactions of the other party are a matter that will provide insight the student should be told to observe the physical responses and behaviors the other party performs in reaction to the behavior of the student. E.g. "What did the other person do when you carried on a conversation for five minutes without making eye contact with them? What do you believe to be their interpretation of your behavior? Why do you claim this to be their interpretation of your behavior?

Criterion #5: The need for creating of clear directions for writing the report of the EE and conclusions as a result of engaging in the EE, including:

- **clear identification of the proper format for the written product**
- **clear identification of the questions the student should respond to regarding their experience in engaging in the EE**

Nothing can make the assignment, use and grading of EE's more of a burdensome for the teacher than failing to provide students a crystal clear idea of how they should prepare their written reports. Your grading/critique job will be faster, easier, and more meaningful to the student if you supply them with clear directions governing the format their written report should follow. Not only does this speed your critique time by not having to adapt to numerous student interpretations of how to write the report, it also helps the students by saving them the time of "wondering" how they should approach formatting their report. One of the best ways to both reduce your grading time and enhance student focus is to simply require that students state each question and subquestion (or context) of the exercise as a "title" (as we do using APA format) or subtitle, and then concisely answer or explain their answer to the assigned question. While it may seem superfluous for "college" students, simple directions such as margin requirements, line spacing, type size, etc., also alleviate many grading headaches (these basic directions can reside in a single file and simply be copied into early exercise directions until students get used to the requirements).

Clear identification of what questions students need to answer again reduces your grading burden. As can be seen from the sample exercise provided later on "Posture," clearly stated contexts and questions provide an excellent "template" for students to follow in writing their reports. An added benefit is that students get used to organizing written and oral reports the way their "bosses" request them to.

Criterion #6: Careful Planning of Class Discussions/assignment debriefing

Students are more comfortable talking about the EE's when they are asked clear questions that they can be confident they are responding to appropriately. With EE's that direct students to be attentive to specific elements and to answer specific questions in writing it is easy to provoke initial in-class responses. Begin by reminding the class of the activity they engaged in. Then ask the students to tell what happened when they did a particular portion of the exercise. The answer is a simple report of their experience. If they realize that there is no "wrong" answer, they tend to respond much more freely.

Be prepared to ask follow-up questions. I find that probing questions which establish the contexts which may influence results, such as "Where were you?," or "How long have you known the other person(s)?," are the sort which most frequently need to be asked. Ask several different

students to discuss their experience. After several students have orally reported on their experience, a pattern will inherently emerge. Either most students will have had highly similar experiences or the responses will be divided into two distinctly different results.

If there is high similarity across responses, the next question should be one which asks students what conclusion they can draw regarding the nonverbal element based on what the students have told the class about their experience. This question moves the students from simple reports of their own experience to cognitively processing the meaning that can be drawn from the consistent results that were achieved by a variety of students. I find that wording the question that requests a conclusion in less academic terms such as, "With what Mary, Bob, and Frances have told us, how do you think people interpret slouched posture? or "what do people seem to think slouched posture communicates?"

If the responses fall into two or more dissimilar groups of results, the follow-up questions in class should direct the students to identify the factors other than the results that were different about the experiences. After the contributing factors are drawn to the students' attention they are ready to respond to conclusion provoking questions. The conclusions reached in each case are principles of nonverbal communication. As a teacher you should be prepared to summarize and to restate the principles thus discovered. While it is nice to have people volunteer to speak, the goal is to involve as many students as possible. Be alert to nonverbal cues that students have something to say and call upon them.

I also sometimes notice that there are students who do not give indications that they want to speak but who write good reports. In these cases, I first urge the to student to participate when I return one of their good papers. If they continue to not volunteer, I specifically call upon them. Good in-class questioning skills can make or break an otherwise excellent EE:

- Be willing to wait a bit for an answer
- Be attentive to the students response (a clear shift of focus away from the student while the student is speaking will stifle their response and may make them more hesitant to speak in the future)
- Be prepared to prompt the student to provide a more complete answer when needed.
- Restate responses that are spoken too softly for the other students to hear, and encourage the softly spoken student to speak up.

The key to planning successful class discussions is to plan out questions in advance (much like a trial lawyer does when determining what they want to get out of a witness) and encourage student participation by avoiding the appearance of there being clear right and wrong answers.

Determining very specific conceptual learning goals that are to be achieved and identifying experiences that will illuminate the selected concepts are the key to creating meaningful EE's. The exercises are more likely to provide the desired outcomes and facilitate discovery of nonverbal communication principles if students are given clear directions for the conduct of the exercise. Discovery of the desired principles and productive discussions are further facilitated by the provision of clear directions for written reports of the experiences which help the students focus upon the factors which will reveal the principles.

Suggestions for EE's to be Used in the Nonverbal Communication Course

Most components of nonverbal communication may be explored through EE's. The textbooks for nonverbal communication courses typically contain chapters for each major nonverbal component (Richmond & McCroskey, 1995; Hickson & Stacks, 1989; Leathers, 1992; Malandro, Barker and Barker, 1989), making it particularly easy to identify potential experiential foci. The following list identifies components and some of the features of the component which may be examined through EE's.

Appearance

- Identification and physical description of friends with each main body type - ectomorphic, mesomorphic, and endomorphic - and their personalities
- Identification of examples of types and features of clothing that reveal the wearers' rank and status, group membership, power and success, and personality.

Gesture and Movement

- The effects of the use of up-right and slouched posture within a variety of contexts (This exercise is more fully discussed in the next section.)
- The effects of use or misuses of specific types of gestures and movements such as illustrators, regulators, adaptors

Face & Eye Behavior

- The effects and interpretations of the absence of eye contact in conversations lasting five minutes or more.
- The effects of maintaining a neutral expression throughout an interpersonal interchange lasting five minutes or more.

Space

- The effects of violation of interactional space norms, such as:
  - standing within 18 inches of a stranger
  - unobtrusively increasing the space between yourself and conversational partner while continuing to communicate
  - unobtrusively reducing the space between yourself and conversational partner while continuing to communicate.

Olfaction

- The effects of wearing positively perceived fragrances and negatively perceived fragrances.

Chronemics

- The effects of violations of norms for appropriate arrival time in a variety of contexts.
- The interpretation and reaction to being kept waiting by others.

Environment

- the effects upon expectations and behavior produced by various architectural and interior design features.

The above examples are simply examples of foci which could be used for creating EE's.

Extended Example of an Experiential Exercise

The following example is an exercise I have my students engage in. The purpose of the exercise is to help the students discover that the postures they use affect other peoples perceptions of them, the interpersonal communication that occurs, and their own feelings of attentiveness and involvement.

COM 270 - HOMEWORK #2 - POSTURE

Try out two distinctly different types of posture in a variety of situations as follows:

A. Sit very upright, with your feet on the floor, with a pleasant facial expression, physically oriented toward the target individual.

1. In a class (other than this one) which is not a big mass class. Note - the teacher is the target individual.

2. When communicating with a close friend or family member.

3. When communicating with someone you know only slightly.

B. Sit slumped forward or back, legs crossed or sprawled, arms crossed or limp.

1. In a class (other than this one) which is not a big mass class. Note - the teacher is the target individual.

2. When communicating with a close friend or family member.

3. When communicating with someone you know only slightly.

For each of the above 6 situations, answer the following questions, in writing. I anticipate that your response will take approximately one to two pages, double spaced, typewritten.

1. Identify the circumstances and context of the situation.

2. Did you note any differences in the other person's (or people's) behavior? If so what? (For example: length of communication, topic, their verbal or nonverbal behavior)

3. Did you notice any differences in yourself? (For example, your attentiveness, your interest in the message, your satisfaction with the communication)

This exercise invariably results in reports from most students that in the upright-posture classroom condition the teacher was more attentive to them, they found the lecture more

interesting than usual, they were called upon and volunteered to speak more, that they learned more, and the class period seemed shorter than usual. In the slumped-posture classroom condition they report that the teacher either gave them negative nonverbal feedback or avoided looking at them, that they found it difficult to pay attention or take notes, they became sleepy and bored, and class seemed to last forever. Follow-up of these reports leads to the discovery that teachers interpret upright-posture as revealing interest and attentiveness and respond with positive behaviors. Students also discover that their posture affects their perceptions and makes them more alert and attentive.

They report that the use of upright posture when interacting with friends is sometimes perceived as interest and promotes serious, attentive conversation, while in other cases the upright posture feels awkward and is viewed with suspicion by their friends or family. This suspicion typically takes the form of the other person asking what they are up to or what is wrong? They report that the slouched posture is usually more natural in these interactions, and often goes unremarked on by others, but that the conversations were more shallow and seemed to jump from topic to topic. The main exceptions are students who report that the other person indicated that they perceived the posture as revealing a lack of interest in the communication that was taking place, or as disrespectful. The first exception is most likely to occur when the other person is trying to talk about something which they consider personally important. The latter exception occurs most often within the context of communicating with a parent or a person with higher status. Follow-up questions lead to the conclusion that prior experience results in expectations and that violation of the expectations may result in either a change in the other person's behavior or a search by the other person to find and explanation for the unexpected behavior.

Students report that the use of upright posture often facilitates better communication when talking with people who are strangers. They find that the slouched posture often acts as a barrier to extablishing rapport or conducting a satisfying interaction with a stranger; often resulting in very brief interaction which is terminated by the stranger. Follow-up questions result in the conclusion that strangers interpret the posture used as revealing the degree of interest in themselves and the interaction and therefore respond positively to the upright posture and negatively to the slouched posture.

This example is merely one of several exercises that could be conducted with posture as a focal element and which will lead to the discovery of principles such as the type of posture used is interpreted as an indicator of interest and involvement. As mentioned in the foregoing section which dealt with the amount of time needed for grading, exercises can be broken into smaller segments to reduce the volume of material to be graded. In this exercise it is important that students experience the differing responses they receive within the same context as a result of the two postures. This assignment could be divided into three parts with one-third of the class given the assignment of using the two postures with the classroom setting, one-third given the assignment of using the postures when communicating with friends or family, and one-third of the class trying the two postures with strangers. This division of the assignment will result in shorter papers and less time spent grading. Since there are exceptions to the responses, however, the response that is most usual is more likely to emerge and there is a greater likelihood that the principles will be discovered, if the groups have ten or more members.

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